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ABSTRACT

Information to help faculty, administrators, and students at Michigan State University understand and eliminate sex discrimination on campus is presented in two fact sheets. On campus, sex discrimination is the limiting preconceptions that faculty, administrators, or students may have concerning appropriate and expected behaviors, abilities, career directions, and personal goals of female students that are based on sex rather than on individual interest and ability. Discriminatory behaviors can discourage women's classroom participation, cause them to avoid or drop certain classes, and undermine their confidence. Information is provided on common discriminatory behaviors against women, including ignoring or interrupting female students, avoiding eye contact, offering little guidance, and making disparaging comments about women or using sexist humor. Consideration is also given to problems faced by minority women, older, reentry women, and lesbians; and the university's grievance procedures. Recommendations are offered for administrators and faculty to facilitate change, including encouraging a positive classroom environment and encouraging support outside the classroom. Suggestions for inservice faculty workshops are provided, along with ways students can cope or facilitate change. (SW)

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FACT SHEET FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS ON

ACHIEVING CAMPUS EQUALITY

Division of Women's Programs • Department of Human Relations
380 Administration Building • Michigan State University

This Fact Sheet is designed to assist the faculty and administrators at Michigan State University to understand sex discrimination on campus. It is anticipated that through this awareness, behaviors that discourage female students from full intellectual achievement will be altered so that faculty and administrative support will contribute to the equality of educational opportunity for all students.

Campus Sex Discrimination

Sex discrimination is a culturally developed pattern of attitudes and behaviors on sex. Sex discrimination within a higher educational setting is the limiting preconceptions that a faculty member and an administrator may have concerning appropriate and expected behaviors, abilities, career directions, and personal goals of female students that are based on sex rather than an individual interest and ability.

Most administrators and faculty want to treat all students fairly and as individuals with particular capabilities. However, some may overtly – or, more often inadvertently – treat men and women students differently, and frequently these behaviors go unnoticed. Nevertheless, these patterns, by which women students are either singled out or ignored because of their sex, may leave women students feeling less confident about their place in the university community.

Research Findings

Recently, a number of colleges and universities have begun to recognize the importance of the institutional atmosphere – both within and outside the classroom – in fostering or impeding women students' development. James C. Hearn and Susan Olzals in "The Role of College Major Departments in the Reproduction of Sexual Inequality," state that "females tend more than males to be attuned to the personal supportiveness of these environments." Joseph Katz writes in *Men and Women Learning Together: A Study of College Students in the Late 1970's* that "there is still a tendency for women to think of themselves as not quite on par with men . . . women as meeting the challenge creatively, but they could also use more help from their teachers . . ."

The Effect of Discriminatory Behaviors on Women Students

A chilling campus environment can discourage classroom participation, cause women to avoid or drop certain classes, dampen their career aspirations and undermine their confidence. Sex discrimination creates a frustrating situation for the victim of this kind of abuse. Women feel angry because of this unfair treatment. They feel helpless because of their fear that saying anything could affect their grades and futures. Often they feel inadequate because they are not taken seriously. When relationships with administrators and faculty are minimized through the use of disparaging comments and subtle differences in behavior, full intellectual development and professional success are limited.

Common Discriminatory Behaviors

If you display various behaviors that break down along sex lines, you are discriminating. To help you become aware of some of the more common discriminatory patterns so that you will avoid their use, below are listed those that are more frequently employed:

- Ignoring
- Interrupting
- Maintaining physical distance
- Avoiding eye contact
- Offering little guidance and constructive criticism

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- Attributing success to luck or factors other than ability
- Disparaging comments about women in general, their intellectual abilities, and their professional potential
- Sexist humor as a classroom or administrative device
- Use of the generic "man" or "he" when referring to women and men
- Turning a discussion of a woman student's work toward a discussion of her physical attributes
- Grouping students according to sex in a way which implies that women are not as competent, do not have equal status to men, or are not to be taken seriously
- Making unsolicited sexual overtures to students

Groups of Women Especially Affected: Minority Women

Minority women can be discriminated against both through sex and race. Assumptions may be made concerning a minority woman's career orientation based on her race or sexual status or both. Teachers and administrators may think of minority women as representatives of their particular ethnic group rather than as individuals. Also, racially stereotyped interpretations of minority women's individual behaviors may interfere with effective faculty/administrative and student interaction. For example, assumptions may be made that a black woman's silence is due to "sullenness" or an Asian American woman's silence to "natural passivity."

Older, Re-Entry Women

Older women face problems specific to their group. Frequently, they are devalued because of sex, age, and part-time status. They are often viewed as bored, middle-aged women who are returning because they have nothing better to do. In actuality, these women are usually highly motivated and successful. According to reports on re-entry women, this occurs despite the fact that they sometimes, initially, lack self-confidence and are hesitant about participation in class and extra-curricular activities. Currently, older women constitute the fastest growing segment of the postsecondary student population.

Lesbians

Although lesbians can be legally discriminated against outside the Michigan State University community, the University's anti-discrimination policy prohibits discrimination based on sexual preference. Faculty and administrators may be threatened by and uncomfortable with the sexual preference of a female student. These attitudes can place lesbians at a significant educational disadvantage. Administrators' and faculty's feelings may cause them not to work with this group because they think lesbians do not deserve their time and attention. Lesbians can be discouraged from pursuing desired professions because of their sexual preference. For example, a professor or administrator may assume that lesbians should not work as teachers because they should not have contact with children. Sexual harassment is particularly an issue for lesbians because disparaging language and verbal taunts are often directed at their sexual choice.

Facilitating Change: Recommendations for Administrators and Faculty

General Recommendations

- Develop an awareness of MSU's anti-discrimination policy statement, which makes it clear that sexist behavior is not appropriate and will not be tolerated.
- Develop criteria for providing an equitable learning environment to be used in evaluating applicants for faculty and administrative positions.
- Include university climate issues as a factor in merit evaluations.
- Require sex discrimination issues be included in student evaluations.
- Hold informal meetings to stimulate awareness of the topic.
- Use the active support of respected faculty and administrators who share the objective of sex equity.
- Ask heads of units, either formally or informally, what they are doing/have done to ensure an equitable environment.
- Support sexual equality by mentioning it in speeches as an institutional priority.

Recommendations for Faculty

- Include in required introductory courses a unit on sex/status differences in verbal and nonverbal behavior and the valuation of behaviors by sex.
- Use available means (observers, videotape, etc.) for observation of your own classes to determine whether you inadvertently treat women and men students differently.
- Administer a survey to your students to determine whether women and men students find the atmosphere in your class equally hospitable and to measure men's and women's perceptions of sex-biased differences in classroom interaction.
- Where appropriate, devise assignments in which students learn research methods by collecting data concerning equality on the campus.
- Use the information collected above to affirm or change your own behavior and to discover the areas in which awareness needs to be developed in your students.

Workshop Recommendations

- Sponsor workshops, seminars, conferences, and individual consultation sessions on campus equality for faculty and administrators. Include teaching assistants since they often handle introductory courses, and their behavior may establish the classroom atmosphere for incoming women students.
- Develop in-service workshops for academic and residence hall advisers to familiarize them with the issue as well as with existing channels for seeking counseling and exploring grievance procedures.
- Educate the staff of continuing education programs, re-entry programs, and minority centers, etc. in achieving campus equality by planning workshops or group counseling sessions that focus on the problems special groups of women may face.

Grievance Procedures

The University has established grievance procedures for dealing with this issue. Familiarize yourself with Michigan State University's *Anti-Discrimination Policy and Procedures*. This understanding will help ensure that your behavior does not include sexual and gender harassment which might contradict the university's policy. Be aware that if you persist with these behaviors, especially after being confronted with your actions, a formal or informal grievance may be filed against you.

For more information or future assistance confer with the individuals listed below if you have a concern regarding this issue.

The University Ombudsman
101 Linton Hall – 353-8830

The Division of Women's Programs/Department of Human Relations
380 Administration Building – 353-3922

The Anti-Discrimination Judicial Board/Department of Human Relations
Executive Secretary
380 Administration Building – 353-3922

Information taken from "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women," published by the Project on the Status & Education of Women

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September 1983

FACT SHEET FOR STUDENTS ON

ACHIEVING CAMPUS EQUALITY

Division of Women's Programs • Department of Human Relations
380 Administration Building • Michigan State University

What is sex discrimination?

Sex discrimination is a culturally developed pattern of attitudes and behaviors that result in discrimination based on sex. The old saying that "a woman must be twice as good to get half as far as a man" still contains a core of truth. Our society tends in many ways to value men more than it values women and to assume that men's work and words are important, women's less so.

What is campus sex discrimination?

Sex discrimination within a higher educational setting is the limiting preconceptions that a faculty member, administrator, or student may have concerning appropriate and expected behaviors, abilities, career directions, and personal goals of female students that are based on sex rather than on individual interest and ability. Sometimes these behaviors are directed towards women in general, i.e., in class, in conference, and in administrative affairs. It is pervasive and frequently subtle. Often it is inadvertently communicated even by concerned members of the University community.

How can those behaviors affect me?

A chilling classroom environment for women can discourage classroom participation, cause women to avoid or drop certain classes, dampen their career aspirations, and undermine their confidence. Sex discrimination creates a frustrating situation for the victim of this kind of abuse. Women feel angry because of this unfair treatment. They feel helpless because of their fear that saying anything could affect their grades and futures. And they often feel inadequate because they are not taken seriously. When relationships with faculty are minimized through the use of disparaging comments and subtle differences in behavior, full intellectual achievement and professional success are limited.

How can I tell when I'm being discriminated against?

If a professor, administrator, or student displays various behaviors in class that break down along sex lines, chances are you are being discriminated against. If in class, check with others and see if they share your perceptions of your teacher's behavior. To help you understand some of the more common discriminatory patterns, below are listed those that are more frequently employed by a faculty member or T.A.:

- Ignoring
- Interrupting
- Maintaining physical distance
- Avoiding eye contact
- Offering little guidance and constructive criticism
- Attributing success to luck or factors other than ability
- Disparaging comments about women in general, their intellectual abilities and their professional potential
- Sexist humor as a classroom device
- Use of the generic "man" or "he" when referring to women and men
- Turning a discussion of a woman student's work toward a discussion of her physical attributes
- Grouping students according to sex in a way which implies that women are not as competent, do not have equal status to men, or are not to be taken seriously
- Making unsolicited sexual overtures to students

How does sex discrimination affect minority women?

Minority women can be discriminated against both through sex and race. Assumptions may be made by faculty concerning a minority woman's career orientation based on her race or sexual status or both. Teachers may think of minority women as representatives of their particular ethnic group rather than as individuals. Also, racially stereotyped interpretations of minority women's individual behaviors may interfere with effective faculty and student interaction. For example, a professor may assume that a black woman's silence is due to "sullenness," or an Asian American woman's silence is due to "natural passivity."

Are there particular effects of sex discrimination on older women who are re-entering the university?

Yes. Older women face problems specific to their group. Frequently they are devalued because of sex, age, and part-time status. They are often viewed as bored, middle-aged women who are returning because they have nothing better to do. In actuality, these women are usually highly motivated and successful. According to reports on re-entry women, this occurs despite the fact that they sometimes initially lack self-confidence and are hesitant about classroom participation. Currently, older women constitute the fastest growing segment of the postsecondary student population.

In what ways are lesbians affected by sex discrimination?

First of all, it is important to know that although lesbians can be legally discriminated against outside the Michigan State University community, the University's anti-discrimination policy prohibits discrimination based on sexual preference. Even so, faculty, administrators, and students may feel threatened by and uncomfortable with the sexual preference of a female student. These attitudes can place lesbians at a significant educational disadvantage. Administrators', faculty's, and students' feelings may cause them not to work with this group because they think lesbians do not deserve their time and attention. Lesbians can be discouraged from joining beneficial University organizations and from pursuing desired professions because of their sexual preference. For example, a professor or administrator may assume that lesbians should not work as teachers because they should not have contact with children.

Sexual harassment is particularly an issue for lesbians because disparaging language and verbal taunts are often directed at their sexual choice.

What can I do if I think I'm being discriminated against?

1. One option is to bring your concerns to your instructor's attention. If other students share your perceptions, you may wish to do this collectively. Take along supportive friends if others in the class will not join you.
2. There are university people and groups who are concerned about sex discrimination. These people may be able to assist you:

   The University Ombudsman
   101 Linton Hall – 353-8830

   The Division of Women's Programs/Department of Human Relations
   380 Administration Building – 353-3922

   The Anti-Discrimination Judicial Board/Department of Human Relations
   Executive Secretary
   380 Administration Building – 353-3922

3. Keep a record of the times you have experienced this behavior.
4. Ask classmates if they will corroborate your experience.
5. Where appropriate, discuss problems of classroom climate with department chair and/or dean. Raising these issues as a group may be helpful.
6. If you have talked to the faculty member, teaching assistant, or staff person, and sex discrimination

continues, write a letter to him/her including your documented record of the incidents and explain why they are offensive to you. State that you have not obtained results from the previous discussion(s) and note the date(s) of the discussion(s). Send a copy to the administrator of his/her department or unit. If you fail to receive a satisfactory answer, request a meeting with the two of them and take along an observer.

7. If the previous steps do not resolve the situation, it may be necessary to file a formal grievance. The first step of that process is to contact one of the individuals listed above.
8. Use your course evaluation forms to express your views.

How can I encourage a positive classroom environment?

1. Give credit or "authorship" to comments made by women classmates, i.e., "... as Marian said ..."
2. Give your professors feedback for efforts to create an equitable learning climate – either by telling him/her or by nodding or making eye contact after a positive exchange.
3. Recognize features of your own speaking and nonverbal style that may be counterproductive in a classroom setting. Ask for feedback on this from classmates.
4. Hold meetings or workshops on anxiety about class participation.

What can I do outside the classroom to make people aware, encourage support, and help institute change?

The following list may assist you in answering these questions:

1. Encourage student publications such as the school newspaper to write about the subject of classroom sex discrimination.
2. Hold meetings, workshops, or hearings about this situation.
3. Encourage student organizations to press for inclusion of this issue in faculty development programs and in official statements relating to teaching standards.
4. If your department is unsupportive, seek other professional organizations for women in your field.
5. Create a support group comprised of women students majoring in your area or an organization in which problems can be aired and strategies devised to deal with them.
6. If the campus has a minority center or other related special interest group, alert them to this problem and how it is affecting this select group of women.

Information taken from "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women," published by the Project on the Status & Education of Women.

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